THE SHATTERED EARTH CHRONICLES

1 ETERNITY
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WINTER SPECIAL • ALL NEW STORY AND ART!

Paul O'Connor • Scott Benefiel • Tom Baxa

EX MUTANTS™

EX-MUTANTS WINTER SPECIAL

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EX-MUTANTS: Spawned by radioactive and biological weapons unleashed in World War Three, five carefully chosen mutants—Angela, Belushi, Erin, Lorelei, and Vikki—were transformed by Dr. Emmanuel Cugat back into genotypical humans. Dubbed the Ex-Mutants, they became legends in their own time.

EX-MUTANTS WINTER SPECIAL #1
The Shattered Earth Chronicles
February, 1989.
Distributed monthly by Eternity Comics, a division of Malibu Graphics, Inc., 1355 Lawrence Drive #212, Newbury Park, CA 91320. (805)499-3015.
$1.95/$2.50 in Canada.
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CHRISTMAS 2022
NEW YORK CITY.
THE GREATEST CITY IN THE WORLD IS SILENT, SAVE FOR THE SOFT SOUND OF FALLING SNOW--
ohc
--AND THE SQUEALING OF THE RATS.
THERE WAS A TIME WHEN THIS CITY PUT ON ITS BEST FACE FOR CHRISTMAS.
all new for Christmas '92
MEGA MALL
UNDERGROUND COMPLEX
SHOPS, RESTAURANTS
NOW CHRISTMAS, LIKE THIS CITY, BELONGS TO THE GHOSTS.

I'M FREEZING.
QUIT COMPLAINING.
C'MON. YOU'VE GOT TO ADMIT THESE COSTUMES WEREN'T DESIGNED FOR WINTER!
THIS IDEA IS LOOKING WORSE AND WORSE.
WE'VE GOT TO FIND DOC A CHRISTMAS PRESENT!
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT CHRISTMAS? I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT IT IS.
CHRISTMAS WAS A CHURCH FESTIVAL CELEBRATED BY THE CHRISTIANS EACH DECEMBER 25TH. IT WAS OF GREAT RELIGIOUS IMPORTANCE, AND HAD ROOTS IN PAGAN TRADITION AS WELL.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND RELIGION. AND I'M STILL COLD.
YOU'RE ALWAYS REDUCING THINGS TO NUTS AND BOLTS. WHAT ABOUT THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS?
I DON'T BELIEVE IN ANYTHING I CAN'T TOUCH.

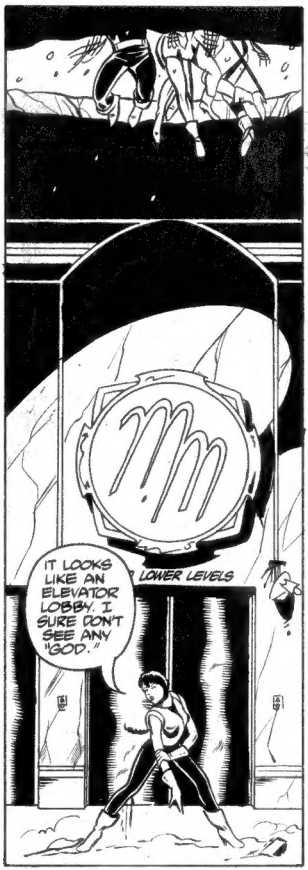
WELL, I CAN TOUCH THE SNOW, AND I'M STILL COLD.
WE PROBABLY SHOULD SEEK SOME COVER--
--IT'S NOT A FIT NIGHT OUT FOR MAN NOR BEAST.
HOT MEAL ON A COLD NIGHT.
THERE'S MORE TO CHRISTMAS THAN CHURCH CEREMONY,
SURE, THAT'S IMPORTANT--BUT YOU'RE FORGETTING TOYS AND TREES AND CHRISTMAS DINNER. MISTLETOE, AND STOCKINGS HUNG BY THE FIRE--
WHERE DO YOU GET THIS STUFF?
DOC'S MOVIE COLLECTION. HE'S GOT THIS GREAT MOVIE CALLED IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, AND IT'S ALL ABOUT CHRISTMAS. THEN THERE'S MIRACLE ON 42ND STREET, AND A CARTOON CALLED THE GRINCH THAT STOLE CHRISTMAS...
WHAT'S A "GRINCH"?
AN UGLY, SHRIVELED, GREEN GUY WITH A CHIP ON HIS SHOULDER--

HO, HO, HO!
MERRY CHRISTMAS, MEAT!
Ex-Mas
with the
Ex-Mutants

LOOK AT THEM! HUMANS!!
I HEAR THEY'RE GODS.
THEY'RE NOT GODS. WE'VE GOT THE ONLY GOD.
YOU'RE MAKING A BIG MISTAKE.
QUIET, YOU. SHOW SOME RESPECT--
ENTRANCE SHOPS THEATRES
MEGA MALL
--YOU'RE ABOUT TO MEET GOD.
PARKING
WHAT IF WE DON'T WANT TO MEET GOD?
I'LL SHOW YOU "TOUGH"!
BLU-- NO!
SWATCH!
TOUGH!

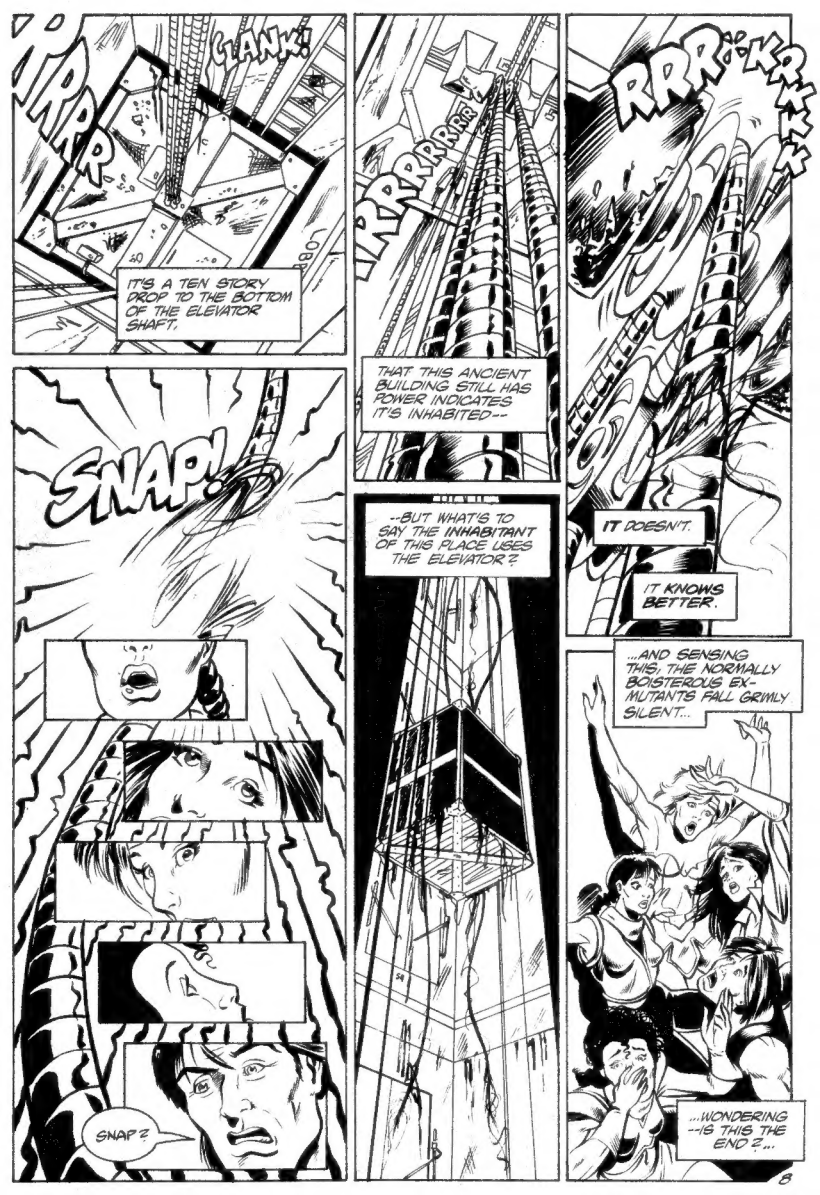
NO!!!

ANGELA! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
I THINK SO. IT'S NOT THAT LONG A FALL.


LOWER LEVELS
IT LOOKS LIKE AN ELEVATOR LOBBY. I SURE DON'T SEE ANY "GOD."

NO NEED TO DESCRIBE WHAT YOU SEE.
WHY NOT?
BECAUSE WE'LL SEE FOR OURSELVES IN A SECOND.
OH.
AAAAAHHHHH!

OOOOF!
WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO?
THOSE BEASTS! THOSE BARBARIANS! THIS WAS A BRAND NEW OUTFIT.
GEE, VICKI--I KIND OF LIKE YOUR NEW LOOK.
OH, YOU...
SEE ANYTHING?
WELL, WE'RE NOT GETTING OUT THE WAY WE CAME IN.
THEN I GUESS WE GO DOWN.
PING
THIS ELEVATOR'S STILL WORKING--MAYBE THE LOWER FLOORS HAVE POWER, TOO.
YOU THINK WE SHOULD GO DOWN?
TO LOWER LEVELS
WHAT CHOICE DO WE HAVE?


RRR
CLANK!
IT'S A TEN STORY DROP TO THE BOTTOM OF THE ELEVATOR SHAFT.
RRRRRRRRR
THAT THIS ANCIENT BUILDING STILL HAS POWER INDICATES IT'S INHABITED--
RRR--KRAK
IT DOESN'T.
IT KNOWS BETTER.
SNAP!
SNAP?
--BUT WHAT'S TO SAY THE INHABITANT OF THIS PLACE USES THE ELEVATOR?
...AND SENSING THIS, THE NORMALLY BOISTEROUS EX-MUTANTS FALL GRIMLY SILENT...
...WONDERING --IS THIS THE END?...

...
...IT'S NOT
IS EVERYBODY ALL RIGHT?
I WAS, UNTIL THE DOORS OPENED.
NOW MY OUTFIT IS REALLY RUINED.
BETTER WE SHOULD HAVE DIED.
AT LEAST THE LIGHTS ARE ON.
AND I SEE A BRIGHTER GLOW UP AHEAD.
WOW--GET A LOAD OF THIS!

MEGAMALL WAS SCHEDULED TO OPEN IN TIME FOR THE BIG RUSH OF CHRISTMAS, 1982

THE **WAR** CHANGED THOSE PLANS.

MEGAMALL WAS THE ULTIMATE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE, FEATURING HUNDREDS OF SHOPS AND RESTAURANTS AND ALL THE LATEST GOODS AND SERVICES--

--AN ATMOSPHERE OF CONSUMERISM RUN AMOK, PRESERVED FROM THE WAR AND THE YEARS THAT FOLLOWED BY TEN STORIES OF **STEEL** AND **CONCRETE** ABOVE

TO THE EX-MUTANTS, RAISED IN A WORLD OF SHORTAGES AND STARVATION--

--IT'S AS IF THEY'VE STUMBLED INTO SOME SUBTERRANEAN TREASURE TROVE.

EVERYONE IS AWED--

--SOME MORE THAN OTHERS.

WOW. MAYBE GOD REALLY **DOES** LIVE HERE.

SOMETHING DOES LIVE HERE, BUT IT IS NO GOD.
THIS IS GREAT. IT WILL BE EASY TO FIND DOC CUGAT A PRESENT HERE!
AND MAYBE I CAN FIND A NEW OUTFIT-- LET'S GO!
MAYBE WE SHOULD BE CAREFUL
WHAT'S THE HARM?
WE'VE BEEN UNDER A LOT OF PRESSURE LATELY, AND WE COULD ALL USE A BREAK. BESIDES--
--MY INTUITION TELLS ME EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT.
SORRY, I DON'T HAVE GREAT CONFIDENCE IN INTUITION.
WHY IS IT LORELEI SUDDENLY DISTRUSTS INTUITION?
DOES SHE HAVE A HUNCH SOMETHING IS ABOUT TO GO DREADFULLY WRONG?

MRK
LOOK OUT!
RAW
SMASH!
IT'S LIKE HACKING AT MUD!
HACK!
CHOP!
IT'S NOT EVEN HURT!
SHLAK

IT'S GOT TO HAVE A WEAK SPOT...!
ANGELA!!
MAYBE YOUR HIDE IS TOUGH ENOUGH TO TURN OUR BLADES--
--BUT EVEN A THICK SKULL LIKE YOURS IS NO DEFENSE FOR A STRONG, TRUE STROKE.
CHOP!

NO.
ITS NAME IS MADDOG
IT WAS BORN MANY YEARS AGO IN A FARAWAY PLACE, WHERE IT WAS WORSHIPPED WITH FEAR AS A GOD OF BESTIAL FURY.
MRAW
SHRIP!
--UNTIL THE PALADINS OF THE PANTHEON APPEARED, AND PUT AN END TO ITS FUN.
KRAK
FOR YEARS IT STALKED THE RUINS OF THE SHATTERED EARTH, WREAKING HAVOC AND SPILLING BLOOD--
IT'S GOOD TO BE A GOD.
THEN IT FLED TO THIS CITY OF GHOSTS, WITH ITS FORGOTTEN LABYRINTH OF TUNNELS AND CHAMBERS FAR BELOW ITS EMPTY STREETS.
WHERE ITS WORSHIP WAS RESTORED, LIKE THAT AFFORDED ANOTHER MAN-BEAST IN ANOTHER LABYRINTH, THOUSANDS OF YEARS BEFORE.

MRAWW

BELUSHI KNOWS HE'S IMPALED MADDOG CLEAR THROUGH TO WHERE ITS HEART SHOULD BE.

AND WHEN THE MONSTER DOES NOT FALL BUT INSTEAD LAPSES INTO EVEN GREATER FURY--

--BELUSHI BEGINS TO SENSE HE'S GOT A TIGER BY THE TAIL.

WHAT'S...THE MATTER WITH ME ? I'M NOT HURT ...BUT I CAN BARELY MOVE.
DAMN! WHY DO I ALWAYS FREEZE UNDER FIRE ?!?

LORELEI -- COME BACK!
STYLES
LORELEI DOES NOT RESPOND.
BUT IS IT DETERMINATION OR FEAR THAT DRIVES HER FROM THE FIELD OF BATTLE?
VIKKI!
SO IT'S JUST YOU AND ME, HUH?
GOTTA KEEP HIM AWAY FROM HER.
SQULP!
MY SWORD'S DOING ME NO GOOD IN YOUR CHEST--
--SO LET'S SEE WHAT GOOD I CAN DO BY STICKING IT SOMEPLACE ELSE

MRRRRRAWWWWWW!
BLU! GET DOWN!
HUH?
BWAM
SHUNK clik!
BWAM
SHUNK-CLIK!

BWAM!
ILLUMINATED BY THE BRIEF FLASH OF HER WEAPON, LORELEI SEES A DARK AND MYSTERIOUS COMPLEX OF TUNNELS.
HER EYES DAZZLED BY HER MUZZLE FLARE, THE DARKNESS THAT FOLLOWS IS ABSOLUTE
LORELEI STANDS SILENTLY IN THE DARK, WITH WARM SPOTS SWIMMING BEFORE HER EYES--
--AND, IMPOSSIBLY, SHE SUDDENLY SEES HERSELF AS SHE ONCE WAS, AND WILL BE AGAIN--
--DEEP IN THE HEART OF A LABYRINTH BENEATH ANCIENT KNOSSOS, A THIN SILKEN STRAND OF WEB IN HER HAND
SHE HAS FOLLOWED THE STRAND FOR MANY HOURS, AND SENSES HER GOAL IS JUST AROUND THE NEXT BEND--
OH!

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
THE SPELL IS BROKEN--
--BUT FOR LORELEI, WHO DOES NOT BELIEVE IN ANYTHING SHE CANNOT TOUCH, THE MYSTERY IS JUST BEGINNING.
YOU'RE A PRETTY GOOD SHOT. WHERE DID YOU GET THE GUN?
I...FOUND A STORE. A SPORTING GOODS STORE.
SO THE SHOPS DO STILL HAVE STUFF IN THEM! GREAT!
I CAN STILL FIND A NEW OUTFIT...?
I THINK WE SHOULD CANCEL THE SHOPPING TRIP. WE'RE LUCKY TO BE ALIVE--I DON'T WANT TO BE HERE IF THAT THING COMES BACK

C'MON, ERIN. IT WILL ONLY TAKE A MINUTE.
WHAT I CAN'T UNDERSTAND IS THAT MONSTER--
--HE'S SURROUNDED BY SO MANY NICE THINGS, BUT HE'S STILL A BEAST.
MAYBE POSSESSIONS HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH HAPPINESS.
ALL RIGHT! EVERYONE GET WHAT YOU WANT --BUT MAKE IT QUICK! WE'RE NOT SAFE HERE!
AREN'T YOU GOING TO GET ANYTHING, LORELEI?
NO
...I THINK I'VE ALREADY FOUND MY GIFT.

DESPITE THEIR ADVANCED BIOLOGICAL AGE --
--THE EX-MUTANTS ARE REALLY LITTLE MORE THAN CHILDREN.
LIKE CHILDREN, THEY QUICKLY FORGET THE DANGER THEY HAVE FACED --
--CONSUMED WITH EXCITEMENT AT HAVING BEEN TURNED LOOSE IN A MAGICAL WONDERLAND.
SOME SEE THIS AS THE CHANCE TO FULFILL GIRLISH FANTASIES.
WHILE OTHERS ARE OF A MORE PRACTICAL MIND, EVEN WHEN SUPPOSEDLY INDULGING THEMSELVES.
EVERYBODY SATISFIED ?
OH, ERIN, IT REALLY IS HEAVEN !

LOOK AT ALL THESE THINGS--AND THIS IS JUST SCRATCHING THE SURFACE!
THERE MUST BE FIFTY DIFFERENT SHOE STORES ALONE.
I FOUND SOME CANNED FOOD. WE CAN REPLENISH DOCTOR CUGAT'S STORES.
AND I FOUND THE DOC A CHRISTMAS PRESENT!
LOTS OF NEAT VIDEO GAMES!
SOCCER
DON'T YOU THINK THE DOCTOR IS A LITTLE OLD FOR VIDEO GAMES?
GEE, I NEVER THOUGHT OF THAT.
WHAT DID YOU GET, ANGIE?
NOT MUCH.
A DOG COLLAR? BUT WE DON'T HAVE A DOG.
IT'S NOT FOR THE DOG--
--IT'S FOR ME.
THAT SEEMS UNLIKE YOU.
OH, I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE YOU DON'T KNOW ME VERY WELL.

WE'D BETTER GET MOVING. I FOUND A STAIRWAY BACK BY THE SUPERMARKET --MAYBE IT LEADS TO THE SURFACE.
PAF
PAT
DO WE HAVE TO GO SO SOON?
THIS PLACE IS SO NICE AND NEW AND CLEAN...NOTHING LIKE THAT HORRIBLE WORLD OUTSIDE.
LET'S STAY HERE FOREVER!
I WANT TO STAY!
VIKKI'S TRANSFORMATION FROM SWEETNESS TO SPITE IS SUDDEN --
--LIKE A CAT ABRUPTLY TURNED SAVAGE WHEN SOMEONE TRIES TO TAKE AWAY A RAT IT HAS KILLED.
MRRAW!
MRRAW!
THE SURPRISING RETURN OF THE BEAST REMINDS THEM OF WHO THEY ARE --
--AND OF THE WORLD IN WHICH THEY ACTUALLY LIVE.

THE EX-MUTANTS FLEE UP THE STAIR ERIN DISCOVERED, AND WHILE THEIR PATH IS CRAZY AND TWISTED--
--THEY ARE EVENTUALLY RETURNED TO THE SURFACE.
GATHERED TOGETHER IN THE CLEAR LIGHT OF A NEW DAY, THE EX-MUTANTS FIND IT EASY TO WONDER IF THEIR FANTASTIC NIGHT IN THE LOST SHOPPING MALL HAPPENED AT ALL--
--OR WAS SIMPLY THE STUFF OF BAD DREAMS.
LET'S GET GOING. DOCTOR CUGAT WILL BE WORRIED ABOUT US.
?
"AND THERE'S STILL TIME FOR US TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS."

King Spyder